The CZAR'S SPY

The Mystery of a Silent Love

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SYNOPSIS.

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The yacht Lola narrowly escapes wreck in Leghorn harbor. Gordon Gregg, locum tenens for the British consul, is called upon by Hornby, the Lola's owner, and dines aboard with him and his friend, Hylton Chater. Aboard the yacht he accidentally sees a room full of arms and ammunition and a torn photograph of a young girl. That night the consul's safe is robbed and the Lola puts suddenly to sea. The police find that Hornby is a fraud and the Lola's name a false one. Gregg visits Capt. Jack Durnford of the marines aboard his vessel, and is surprised to learn that Durnford knows, but will not reveal, the mystery of the Lola. "It concerns a woman." In London Gregg is trapped nearly to his death by a former servant, Olinto, who repents in time to save him, but not to give a reason for his treachery. Visiting in Dumfries Gregg meets Muriel Leithcourt, who is strangely affected at the mention of the Lola. Hornby appears. Muriel introduces Hornby as Martin Woodroffe, her father's friend.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

"Of course. They've been engaged nearly a year, but he's been abroad until quite lately. He is rather close about his own affairs, and never talks about his travels and adventures, although one day Mr. Leithcourt declared that his hairbreadth escapes would make a most exciting book if ever written."

"Leithcourt and he are evidently most intimate friends."

"Oh, quite inseparable!" she laughed. "And the other man who is always with them is that short, stout, red-faced old fellow standing over there with the lady in pale blue, Sir Ughtred Gardner. Mr. Woodroffe has nicknamed him 'Sir Putrid.' And we both laughed. "Of course, don't say I said so," she whispered. "They don't call him that to his face, but it's so easy to make a mistake in his name when he's not within hearing. We women don't care for him, so the nickname just fits."

And she gossiped on, telling me much that I desired to know regarding the new tenant of Rannoch and his friends, and more especially of that man who had first introduced himself to me in the consulate at Leghorn.

Half an hour later my uncle's carriage was announced, and I left with the distinct impression that there was some deep mystery surrounding the Leithcourts. Whatever the reason, I had become filled with grave apprehensions. The mystery grew deeper day by day, and was inexplicable.

During the week that followed I sought to learn all I could regarding the new people at the castle.

"They are taken up everywhere," declared my aunt when I questioned her. "Of course, we knew very little of them, except that they had a shoot up near Fort William two years ago, and that they have a town house in Green street. They are evidently rather smart folks. Don't you think so?"

"Judging from their house party, yes," I responded. "They are about as gay a crowd as one could find north of Carlisle just at present."

"Exaxctly. There are some well-known people among them, too," said my aunt. "I've asked them over tomorrow afternoon, and they've accepted."

"Excellent!" I exclaimed, for I wanted an opportunity for another chat with the dark-eyed girl who was engaged to the man whose alias was Hornby. I particularly desired to ascertain the reason of her fear when I had mentioned the Lola, and whether she possessed any knowledge of Hylton Chater.

The opportunity came to me in due course, for next afternoon the Rannoch party drove over in two large brakes, and with other people from the neighborhood and a band from Dumfries, my aunt's grounds presented a gay and animated scene.

As I expected, Woodroffe did not accompany the party. Mrs. Leithcourt, a slightly fussy little woman, apologized for his absence, explaining that he had been recalled to London suddenly a few days before, but was returning to Rannoch again at the end of the week.

"We couldn't afford to lose him," she declared to my aunt. "He is so awfully humorous—his droll sayings and antics keep us in a perfect roar each night at dinner. He's such a perfect mimic."

I turned away and strolled with Muriel, pleading an excuse to show her my uncle's beautiful grounds, not a whit less picturesque than those of the castle, and perhaps rather better kept.

"I only heard yesterday of your engagement, Miss Leithcourt," I remarked presently when we were alone. "Allow me to offer my best congratulations. When you introduced me to Mr. Woodroffe the other day I had no idea that he was to be your husband."

She glanced at me quickly, and I saw in her dark eyes a look of suspicion. Then she flushed slightly, and laughing uneasily said, in a blank, hard voice:

"It's very good of you, Mr. Gregg, to wish me all sorts of such pleasant things."

"And when is the happy event to take place?"

"The date is not exactly fixed—early next year, I believe," and I thought she sighed.

"And you will probably spend a good deal of time yachting?" I suggested, my eyes fixed upon her in order to watch the result of my pointed remark. But she controlled herself perfectly.

"Mr. Woodroffe has gone up to town, your mother says."

"Yes. He received a wire, and had to leave immediately. It was an awful bore, for we had arranged to go for a picnic to Dundrennan abbey yesterday."

"But he'll be back here again, won't he?"

"I really don't know. It seems quite uncertain. I had a letter this morning which said he might have to go over to Hamburg on business, instead of coming up to us again."

There was disappointment in her voice, and yet at the same time I could not fail to recognize how the man to whom she was engaged had fled from Scotland because of my presence.

As we passed along those graveled walks it somehow became vividly impressed upon me that her marriage was being forced upon her by her parents. Her manner was that of one who was concealing some strange and terrible secret which she feared might be revealed. There was a distant look of unutterable terror in those dark eyes as though she existed in some constant and ever-present dread. Of

The Picture Was That of a Young Girl.

course she told me nothing of her own feelings or affections, yet I recognized in both her words and her bearing a curious apathy—a want of the real enthusiasm of affection. Woodroffe, much her senior, was her father's friend, and it therefore seemed to me more than likely that Leithcourt was pressing a matrimonial alliance upon his daughter for some ulterior motive. She was perplexed; she longed to confide and seek advice of someone, yet by reason of some hidden and untoward circumstance her lips were sealed.

I tried to question her further regarding Woodroffe, of what profession he followed and of his past, but she evidently suspected me, for I had unfortunately mentioned the Lola.

Martin Woodroffe did not rejoin the house party at Rannoch. Although I remained the guest of my uncle much longer than I intended, indeed right through the shooting season, in order to watch the Leithcourts, yet as far as we could judge they were extremely well-bred people and very hospitable. We exchanged a good many visits and dinners, and while my uncle several times invited Leithcourt and his friends to his shoot with al fresco luncheon, which the ladies joined, the tenant of Rannoch always invited us back in return.

Thus I gained many opportunities of talking with Muriel, and of watching her closely. I had the reputation of being a confirmed bachelor, and on account of that it seemed that she was in no way averse to my companionship. She could handle a rook rifle as well as any woman, and was really a very fair shot. We often found ourselves alone tramping across the wide open moorland, or along those delightful glens of the Nithsdale, glorious in the autumn tints of their luxurious foliage.

Her father, on the other hand, seemed to view me with considerable suspicion, and I could easily discern that I was only asked to Rannoch because it was impossible to invite my uncle without including myself.

His pronounced antipathy towards me caused me to watch him surreptitiously, and more closely than perhaps I should otherwise have done. He was a man of gloomy mood, and often he would leave his guests and take walks alone, musing and brooding. On several occasions I followed him in secret, and found to my surprise that although he made long detours in various directions, yet he always arrived at the same spot at the same hour—five o'clock.

The place where he halted was on the edge of a dark wood on the brow of a hill about three miles from Rannoch. Leithcourt never went there direct, but always so timed his walks that he arrived just at five, and remained there smoking cigarettes until half-past, as though awaiting the arrival of some person he expected.

In my youth I had sat many a quiet hour there in the darkening gloom and knew the wood well, and was able to watch the tenant of Rannoch from points where he least suspected the presence of another. Once, when I was alone with Muriel, I mentioned her father's capacity for walking alone, whereupon she said:

"Oh, yes, he was always fond of walking. He used to take me with him when we first came here, but he always went so far that I refused to go any more."

She never once mentioned Woodroffe. I allowed her plenty of opportunity for doing so, chaffing her about her forthcoming marriage in order that she might again refer to him. But never did his name pass her lips. I understood that he had gone abroad—that was all.

Often when alone I reflected upon my curious adventure on that night when I met Olinto, and of my narrow escape from the hands of my unknown enemies. I wondered if that ingenious and dastardly attempt upon my life had really any connection with that strange incident at Leghorn. As day succeeded day, my mind became filled by increasing suspicion. Mystery surrounded me on every hand. Indeed, by one curious fact alone it was increased a hundredfold.

Late one afternoon, when I had been out shooting all day with the Rannoch party, I drove back to the castle in the Perth cart with three other men, and found the ladies assembled in the great hall with tea ready. A welcome log fire was blazing in the huge old grate, for in October it is chilly and damp in Scotland and a fire is pleasant at evening.

Muriel was seated upon the high padded fender—like those one has at clubs—which always formed a cozy spot for the ladies, especially after dinner. When I entered, she rose quickly and handed me my cup, exclaiming as she looked at me:

"Oh, Mr. Gregg! What a state you are in!"

"Yes, I was after snipe, and slipped into a bog," I laughed. "But it was early this morning, and the mud has dried."

"Come with me, and I'll get you a brush," she urged. And I followed her through the long corridors and upstairs to a small sitting-room which was her own little sanctum, where she worked and read—a cozy little place with two queer old windows in the colossal wall, and a floor of polished oak, and great black beams above. As my eyes wandered around the room they suddenly fell upon an object which caused me to start with profound wonder—a cabinet photograph in a frame of crimson leather.

The picture was that of a young girl—a duplicate of the portrait I had found torn across and flung aside on board the Lola!

The merry eyes laughed out at me as I stood staring at it in sheer bewilderment.

"What a pretty girl!" I exclaimed quickly, concealing my surprise. "Who is she?"

My companion was silent a moment, her dark eyes meeting mine with a strange look of inquiry.

"Yes," she laughed, "everyone admires her. She was a schoolfellow of mine—Elma Heath."

"Heath!" I echoed. "Where was she at school with you?"

"At Chichester."

"Long ago?"

"A little over two years ago."

"She's very beautiful!" I declared, taking up the photograph and discovering that it bore the name of the same well-known photographer in New Bond street as that I had found on the carpet of the Lola in the Mediterranean.

"Yes. She's really prettier than her photograph. It hardly does her justice."

"And where is she now?"

"Why are you so very inquisitive, Mr. Gregg?" laughed the handsome girl. "Have you actually fallen in love with her from her picture?"

"I'm hardly given to that kind of thing, Miss Leithcourt," I answered with mock severity. "I don't think even my worst enemy could call me a flirt, could she?"

"No. I will give you your due," she declared. "You never do flirt. That is why I like you."

"Thanks for your candor, Miss Leithcourt," I said.

"Only," she added, "you seem smitten with Elma's charms."

"I think she's extremely pretty," I remarked, with the photograph still in my hand. "Do you ever see her now?"

"Never," she replied. "Since the day I left school we have never met. She was several years younger than myself, and I heard that a week after I left Chichester her people came and took her away. Where she is now I have no idea. Her people lived somewhere in Durham. Her father was a doctor."

"Then you have heard absolutely nothing as to her present position or whereabouts—whether she is married, for instance?"

"Ah!" she cried mischievously. "You betray yourself by your own words. You have fallen in love with her. I really believe, Mr. Gregg, if she knew she'd be most gratified—or at least, she ought to be."

At which I smiled, preferring that she should adopt that theory in preference to any other.

She spoke frankly, as a pure honest girl would speak. She was not jealous, but she nevertheless resented—as women do resent such things—that I should fall in love with a friend's photograph.

There was a mystery surrounding that torn picture; of that I was absolutely certain. The remembrance of that memorable evening when I had dined on board the Lola arose vividly before me. Why had the girl's portrait been so ruthlessly destroyed? Hour by hour the mystery surrounding the Leithcourts became more inscrutable, more intensely absorbing. I had searched a copy of the London directory at the Station hotel at Carlisle, and found that no house in Green street was registered as occupied by the tenant of Rannoch; and, further, when I came to examine the list of guests at the castle, I found that they were really persons unknown in society. Leithcourt seemed to possess a long pocket and smiled upon those parasites, officers of doubtful commission and younger sprigs of the pseudo-aristocracy who surrounded him, while his wife, keen-eyed and of superb bearing, was punctilious concerning all points of etiquette, and at the same time indefatigable that her mixed set of guests should enjoy a really good time.

Next day I shot with the Carmichaels of Crossburn, and about four o'clock, after a good day, took leave of the party in the Black Glen, and started off alone to walk home, a distance of about six miles. It was already growing dusk, and would be quite dark, I knew, before I reached my uncle's house. My most direct way was to follow the river for about two miles and then strike straight across the large dense woods, and afterwards

I Listened, Trying to Distinguish the Words Uttered.

over a wide moor full of treacherous bogs and pitfalls for the unwary.

My gun over my shoulder, I had walked on for about three-quarters of an hour, and had nearly traversed the wood, at that hour so dark that I had considerable difficulty in finding my way, when—of a sudden—I fancied I distinguished voices.

I halted. Yes. Men were talking in low tones of confidence, and in that calm stillness of evening they appeared nearer to me than they actually were.

I listened, trying to distinguish the words uttered, but could make out nothing. They were moving slowly together, in close vicinity to myself, for their feet stirred the dry leaves, and I could hear the boughs cracking as they forced their way through them.

Of a sudden, while standing there not daring to breathe lest I should betray my presence, a strange sound fell upon my eager ears.

Next moment I realized that I was at that place where Leithcourt so persistently kept his disappointed tryst, having approached it from within the wood.

The sound alarmed me, and yet it was neither an explosion of fire arms nor a startling cry for help.

One word reached me in the darkness—one single word of bitter and withering reproach.

Heedless of the risk I ran and the peril to which I exposed myself, I dashed forward with a resolve to penetrate the mystery, until I came to the gap in the rough stone wall where Leithcourt's habit was to halt each day at sundown.

There, in the falling darkness, the sight that met my eyes at the spot held me rigid, appalled, stupefied.

In that instant I realized the truth—a truth that was surely the strangest ever revealed to any man.

CHAPTER V.

Contains Certain Confidences.

As I dashed forward to the gap in the boundary wall of the wood, I nearly stumbled over a form lying across the narrow path.

So dark was it beneath the trees that at first I could not plainly make out what it was until I bent and my hands touched the garments of a woman. Her hat had fallen off, for I felt it beneath my feet, while the cloak was a thick woolen one.

Was she dead, I wondered? That cry—that single word of reproach—sounded in my ears, and it seemed plain that she had been struck down ruthlessly after an exchange of angry words.

I felt in my pocket for my vestas, but unfortunately my box was empty. Yet just at that moment my strained ears caught a sound—the sound of someone moving stealthily among the fallen leaves. Seizing my gun, I demanded who was there.

There was, however, no response. The instant I spoke the movement ceased.

It seemed evident that a tragedy had occurred, and that the victim at my feet was a woman. But who?

Of a sudden, while I stood hesitating, blaming myself for being without matches, I heard the movement repeated. Someone was quickly receding—escaping from the spot. I sprang through the gap, straining my eyes into the gloom, and as I did so could just distinguish a dark figure receding quickly beneath the wall of the wood.

In an instant I dashed after it. Down the steep hill to the Scarwater I followed the fugitive, crossing the old footbridge near Penpont, and then up a wild winding glen towards the Cairnmore of Deugh. For a couple of miles or more I was close behind, until, at a turn in the dark wooded glen where it branched in two directions, I lost all trace of the person who flew from me. Whoever it was they had very cleverly gone into hiding in the undergrowth of one or other of the two glens—which, I could not decide.

I stood out of breath, the perspiration pouring from me, undecided how to act.

Was it Leithcourt himself whom I had surprised?

That idea somehow became impressed upon me, and I suddenly resolved to go boldly across to Rannoch and ascertain for myself. Therefore, with the excuse that I was belated on my walk home, I turned back down the glen, and half an hour afterward entered the great well-lighted hall of the castle where the guests, ready dressed, were assembling prior to dinner.

I was welcomed warmly, and just then Leithcourt himself joined his guests, ready dressed in his dinner jacket, having just descended from his room.

"Hullos, Gregg!" he exclaimed heartily, holding out his hand. "Had a long day of it, evidently. Good sport with Carmichael—eh?"

"Very fair," I said. "I remained longer with him than I ought to have done, and have got belated on my way home, so looked in for a refresher."

"Quite right," he laughed merrily. "You're always welcome, you know. I'd have been annoyed if I knew you had passed without coming in."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

BROUGHT ACTION TO AN END

Appearance of the "Deceased" in Chancery Court a Blow to Army of Lawyers.

It was a suit in chancery, and there was a great gathering of the deceased's family, quarreling, as relatives will, over the division of the spoils. The lawyers engaged chuckled, for the suit seemed likely to be prolonged and complicated.

There were many lawyers, too, and the judge marveled at the immensity of the deceased man's family as silk and stuff rose in rapid succession, introducing themselves with the usual formula: "And I, my lord, am for the nephews, or nieces, or fifteenth cousins removed, as the case may be, of the deceased." The procession seemed interminable, but at last it came to an end. Then a small voice was heard timidly saying from the back of the court, "May I be allowed to speak, my lord?"

There was dead silence as his lordship adjusted his spectacles and asked, rather dejectedly, "Who are you?"

The answer was, to say the least, unexpected.

"I am the deceased, my lord," said the modest voice from the back of the court. That ended the action.

Quite unknown to his relatives, the "deceased" had turned up from the wilds of Rhodesia. Obviously a man of humor, he must have taken a delight in watching how "the best-laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley."

Japanese.

The brightest, best tempered and most polite people in the world are the Japanese. They absolutely do not know what it is to quarrel, and it is said that if you throw a stone at a dog or cat in Japan, the animal stands and stares at you in amazement—it actually doesn't know what cruelty means. The Japs are a jolly people and fond of a joke, and they are generous and trustful to a marked degree. They also have a strong sense of pride, and travelers relate a peculiar instance of this trait. If a traveler is annoyed by being followed by a crowd—which, however, is always quiet and respectful—he can cause it to melt away like snowflakes on a hot stove by simply halting and holding out a coin. The Japs feel hurt at being taken for mendicants. Fancy what the result would be if a traveler adopted this expedient in the fee-taking cities of Europe. He would be almost torn to pieces by the crowd trying to get the coin.

Charley's Compliment.

Little Charley was saying good night. After kissing his grandmother, uncle and father, he came to his mamma. "Why do you kiss me last?" she said. "Oh, well," said the little fellow, "you see I don't want your kiss to come off."

Some Shootin'.

In a certain small Ohio town lives a skin-and-bones man named, for convenience and to avoid libel, Bill Skinner. During a large evening downtown some one drew a gun and fired at random into a crowd of merrymakers. The bullet struck Bill Skinner in the thigh.

At once a deputation of citizens started on a run for the nearest and, indeed, the only doctor. It was long after midnight. They beat on the door and yelled, and finally a secondstory window was raised and the doctor's head appeared. It looked in the moonlight like the head of a man himself recently returned from a big time.

"Hey! Doc! Come down," called one of the deputation. "Bill Skinner's been shot."

"Howzat? Bill Skinner? Where was he hit?"

"In the leg."

"Well, well," said Doc, closing his window, 'some shootin'!"

One on the Clergyman.

A New England clergyman of ability has been in other work for several years, and his son, of five summers, has rarely seen him in the pulpit. Recently the little fellow heard his father preach away from home, in vacation, and took early occasion to inquire:

"Aunty, is papa a preacher?"

"Yes, dear."

"But is he a real preacher?"

"Certainly, Teddy."

"But, say, aunty, he isn't much of a preacher, is he?"

The clergyman will not soon hear the last of this criticism.

Sharpening Himself.

When the train stopped at the little southern station the tourist from the north sauntered out and gazed curiously at a lean animal with scraggy bristles, which was rubbing itself against a scrub oak.

"What do you call that?" he asked, curiously, of a native.

"Razorback hawg, suh."

"What is he doing rubbing himself against that tree?"

"He's stropping hisself, suh, just stropping hisself."—Ladies' Home Journal.

Presto Change!

"You know Giblets, the parlor entertainer? Well, he met a beautiful girl just before Easter, made violent love to her, and at last she gave him her hand."

"Quite a romance, eh?"

"You interrupted me. Every one expected they would be married in June, but Giblets broke off the engagement."

"I see, another of his slight of hand tricks."

Too Dark to See.

Mother—Now, Willie, wash your hands and face if you are going to the theater.

Willie—Oh, no, Ma; this is a moving picture show.

Blacksmiths vs. Gardners.

The other day a blacksmith was arguing with a gardner as to which was the first trade in the world.

The gardner said it was gardening, and quoted from Genesis: "Adam was put into the Garden of Eden to till it."

"Ah," said Pat, who had stuck up for his own trade. "Who made the spades?"—Kansas City Star.

Biddy's Bon Mot.

"You'd better hide somewhere," said the rooster to the hen; "the boss has an axe in his hand and he's laying for you."

"Well," said Biddy resignedly, "I presume I have no right to complain; I've been laying for him for a good many years."—Boston Transcript.

Sure Cure.

"Oh, dear," sighed the engaged girl. "I'm so afraid Harold won't make a good husband. He's awfully reckless with his money."

"Never mind, dear," said her mother soothingly. "He'll get over that after he's married."

A Beautiful Defendant.

"I want you to make the outfit for my trial."

"Let me see," mused the experienced modiste. "You'll want a direct testimony suit, a cross-examination gown and something dainty and clinging to faint in."—Kansas City Journal.

The Point of View.

Richard—Bixby's friends say he is a good fellow, and his wife denies it. Which do you believe?

Robert—Both.—Judge.